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ABSTRACT

Despite considerable linguistic diversity in Kenya, the country is increasingly trilingual, with individual Kenyans tending toward varying degrees of proficiency in the vernacular, Swahili, and English. The vernacular is acquired at home and in the neighborhood with co-ethnics in both rural and urban contexts. Swahili is typically learned informally from other nonnative speakers who speak a wide range of varieties of it, but there is a trend toward more formal instruction in school. English is learned within the school system, with English proposed in official policy as the medium of instruction from the fourth year of the system upward. English is used as the standard language of government and business communication. In Africa as a whole there is a tendency among African writers to write in their own languages at the cost of reducing their potential audiences. This tendency will increase vernacular prestige and increase competition with Swahili and English. With increasing literacy in Kenya and heightened pan-African awareness, it is not unlikely that this movement will take a stronger hold there, resulting in enhanced vernacular literacy. (MSE)

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THE KENYAN LANGUAGE SETTING

by
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THE KENYAN LANGUAGE SETTING

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THE LANGUAGES OF KENYA

Kenya, like many other African countries, is linguistically diverse, with languages representing three of the four language families in Africa described by Greenberg (1966): Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan and Niger-Kordofanian. Afro-Asiatic is represented in Kenya by members of the Cushitic and Semitic branches. Nilo-Saharan examples include members of the Western, Eastern and Southern subgroups of the Nilotic grouping of the Chari-Nile branch. All of the Niger-Kordofanian languages spoken in Kenya are Bantu.

The Area Handbook for Kenya (1976) states that Bantu speakers constitute 65 percent of the population. Bantu speakers also constitute a major portion of the peoples of Central, Southern and Western Africa. Bantu speakers in Kenya are all primarily agriculturalists. They are divided into Western Bantu: Luyia, Kisii and Kuria; Central Bantu: Kikuyu, Kamba, Meru, Embu, Tharaka and Mbere; and Coastal Bantu: Mijikenda, Taita, Taveta, Pokomo and Swahili.

Cushitic languages are spoken by about 3 percent of the Kenyan population. While most of the speakers of these languages are cattle or camel pastoralists, there are also agriculturalists (Gosha) and hunter-gatherers (Waata, Aweera) among them. These peoples include speakers of Southern Cushitic, with but one variety, Dahalo, and Lowland East Cushitic, which further branches as Oromoid, Somaloid and Werizoid. Oromoid includes Boran, Orma, Waata and Sakuye; Somaloid includes Somali, Rendille, Gosha, Gabbra and Aweera; Werizoid in Kenya has only one constituent language, Mokogodo (Black 1974, Ehret 1976).

The Semitic branch of Afro-Asiatic is represented by a small number of speakers of Arabic, who live primarily on Kenya's coast.

Western Nilotic is represented by Luo; Eastern Nilotic by two subgroups: Maasai, Samburu and Njemps on the one hand and Iteso and Turkana on the other; and Southern Nilotic by the Kalenjin group: Nandi, Kipsigis, Elgeyo, Sabaot, Marakwet, Tugen, Terik and Pokot.

Geographically, it is possible to present a picture in broad outline of the location of the speakers of these languages, however difficult it may be to avoid oversimplification of a complex geolinguistic mapping problem. Bantu speakers occupy the following areas: the center of the country, a strip along the coast, the hills adjacent to the Tanzania border, various areas near Lake Nyanza, and a strip along the Tana River. These areas are primarily agricultural. The Cushitic speakers occupy the more arid savannah/semi-desert areas of the northeast. These people are primarily pastoralists. The Western Nilotic Luo live around the Lake Nyanza basin, participating in a mixed agricultural-fishing economy. The speakers of Eastern Nilotic languages, primarily pastoralists, live in the central areas of the Rift Valley. The Southern Nilotic speakers, also pastoralists and agriculturalists, occupy areas of the western Rift Valley. This brief description shows that there is considerable linguistic diversity in the rural areas. The language picture in the cities is even more complex, since the urban areas are multiethnic and multilingual to a far greater degree than the rural ones.

THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION

The linguistic diversity of Kenya is an important factor influencing the sociolinguistic profile of the country, as is such diversity elsewhere. By African standards, Kenya is medium-sized, with a total area of 224,960 miles. It has seven distinct geographic regions. The southwestern third of the country is elevated, and the remainder of the country forms an arc of low plateaus and plains. Climate, altitude and vegetation type as well as other environmental factors have played an important role in shaping the forms which culture takes in the distinctive geographic areas. The interaction of environmental and linguistic diversity has resulted in a heterogeneous cultural-linguistic mixture, which, if such diversity were quantifiable, might well exceed the cultural-linguistic diversity of many other African countries. This diversity makes Kenya an interesting setting for the observation of the interaction of linguistic and social factors and their roles in the formal and informal processes of language planning.

As noted in Scotton (1982a), a typical East African (Kenyans included) is familiar with at least one second language, especially if that person is

male. This bilingual model can be further modified in Kenya's case by establishing a three-tiered language hierachy, consisting of the speaker's mother tongue, a regional or national lingua franca and the nation's metropolitan official language. This three-tiered hierarchy of mother tongue, lingua franca, and official language is involved with three general language repertorial types, as described by Heine (1980) and cited in Scotton (1982a): 1) monolingual speakers, who know only their own mother tongues, 2) bilingual speakers, who know their mother tongues and the lingua franca, and 3) trilingual speakers, who know their mother tongues, the lingua franca, and the official language. In Kenya, mother tongue may be any one of the languages referred to in the first section; the lingua franca is almost always Swahili; and the official language is English.

These language repertorial types apply to both rural and urban areas, but it is in the urban areas where the bilinguals and trilinguals are more prevalent. The reasons for this are obvious. In the urban areas there is a greater degree of ethnic and mother-tongue diversity. An ethnically neutral lingua franca often bridges the gap between ethnic groups. In Nairobi, for example, Swahili functions as this lingua franca, although there is also a large group of educated and uneducated speakers of Kikuyu as a second language, partly because the Kikuyu are numerous both nationally and in Nairobi.

Societal urban multilingualism increases the degree of individual urban multilingualism because of the heightened contact among speakers of different languages, but individual rural multilingualism is also often more extensive than one would expect. This is a consequence of rural-urban mobility. At one time or another, many rural persons work in urban areas for greater or lesser periods of time. They achieve varying degrees of proficiency in Swahili during these periods.

Furthermore, in many rural areas, even in those where a "village" may be not much larger than a family homestead and may comprise as few as fifty individuals, "village" traders may be members of other ethnolinguistic groups and the lingua franca may be learned in part to transact with these traders. In Oloyiangalani, a remote primary school community in a Maasai-speaking area of the Athi River plains, the only store is operated by Somali traders. The traders' families comprise the total population of the "village". The traders know some Maasai, but the major language of communication is Swahili.

Another factor in encouraging the lingua franca in rural areas is the presence of government personnel, like school teachers, agricultural advisors and so forth from other areas for whom the use of Swahili is a necessity. These personnel make little effort to acquire the vernacular language of their area of assignment since they are often posted there for limited amounts of time only.

Each of the three language varieties, vernacular language, lingua franca, and official language, possesses a typical mode of acquisition.

The vernacular or mother tongue is acquired in the home and around the neighborhood with co-ethnics both in urban and rural contexts. Among the current generation vernacular monolingualism is typical only of early childhood. The population of vernacular monolinguals in general (Heine's first category referred to above) is decreasing, while the population of speakers in the second and third categories (bilinguals and trilinguals) is on the increase. Gorman (1974) suggests that the older a person is, the more likely he or she is to fall into Heine's monolingual category. Thus, in the home setting, children will use mother tongue most with grandparents, less with parents, decreasing further still with younger siblings and least with older siblings.

The Swahili language is typically learned informally, "picked up," from other non-native speakers who speak a wide range of varieties of this language. These varieties range from highly pidginized forms to those which more closely approximate the standard national variety. Learners may also be in contact with speakers of a native Swahili variety spoken (usually) by people of coastal origin. Native varieties include Kimvita and Kiamu. The nature and variability of this informal learning process results in a pool of speakers with varying degrees of proficiency. Language proficiency of individual speakers may also wax and wane over time as the individual is in and out of situations which require the use of Swahili.

With an increasing number of both rural and urban children in the school system, there is concomitant increased exposure to formal learning of standard Swahili as a school subject. Thus, those who have attended school in the more recent past have received both informal and formal inputs of Swahili.

While Swahili is typically acquired informally, English is learned via the Kenyan school system. In 1981, primary school enrollment was over 3,800,000. In 1980, secondary school enrollment was over 400,000. Current (1983) university enrollment is well over 7,000. Kenyan educational language policy proposes English as the medium of instruction from the Standard Four level (the fourth year of the educational system) upwards. As the percentage of school age children in school increases, the number of persons at lower socioeconomic levels with a knowledge of English will also increase.

English is used for government communication purposes, as is Swahili. In some settings, it is easy to predict the use of one language or the other, but there are others in which the two languages compete. On national holidays, President Moi often delivers his speeches first in English and then in Swahili. However, on national holidays when international visitors are present, he is likely to use English. When addressing international conferences, where it is expected that all his listeners know English, he uses English. On the other hand, outside Nairobi at a fund-raising rally he is likely to use only Swahili. Three quarters of parliamentary debates are in English, one quarter in Swahili, a change over the situation ten years ago, when an English-only policy prevailed. At the district and location level, petitions in English are accepted, but those in Swahili predominate. Other official business may be conducted in either language but Rhoades (1977) suggests that Swahili is more frequently used.

For business, the general rule in office settings is English for international or national level purposes, where interlocutors have at least a secondary education, and Swahili in other cases. Written language is a different matter. It is not unusual to see two people discussing an English language document in Swahili. "Other cases" include the use of Swahili for "small business" discussions, ordinary business transactions such as cashing a check or ordering food and drink.

The above language use stereotypes may not hold when interlocutors share a mother tongue. Several other "violations" of the general use pattern may also occur, but they may be explained in terms of Scotton's model for language choice, discussed in a subsequent section.

Young members of the population with a primary education may use English across ethnic lines and even sometimes intraethnically in rural areas, but

such use is uncommon among other age cohorts in rural areas. The general rule is that Swahili be used in such interethnic settings. In the cities, the most frequently used language among co-ethnics is still the mother tongue, especially in the home setting, but this pattern is under stress. There is increasing use of Swahili and among the more educated, English. The use of the vernacular among co-ethnics is often avoided on the job and replaced by Swahili or English in lower and higher level occupations respectively. Scotton (1982b) discovered that seventy-one percent of her total sample reported using both Swahili and English in cross-ethnic work situations. Sixty-eight percent of those with even a minimum of secondary education said they used mainly English.

Scotton (1982b) proposes a kind of cost-benefit analysis to explain language use. In this model, language's role as a social symbol is viewed both as a societal resource and as an investment. She defines a resource as "something that can be turned to for help or support" while an investment is " something to which people commit themselves for future advantage. Adding a language is an investment of effort and identity." Thus, a language may be a true resource or investment for one person, but not for another. She argues that many Kenyans do not see English as a "good investment" since they do not control other societal elements such as a secondary education or "right" ethnic group membership, which must also be present if the official language is to be of any benefit. Without all the pieces in place, therefore, socioeconomic success is not possible.

Scotton (1982b) also proposes a series of "value sets," abstract symbolic attributes, for each of the two Kenyan lingua francas, the "official" language, English, and the "national" language, Swahili. She suggests that it is the constellation of these value sets which influences the choice or spread of one variety over another. Briefly, the value sets associated with English are: 1) "plus education," because it is normally acquired at school, 2) "plus authority," because it is associated with the asymmetric power relationship devolving from the colonial situation, and 3) "plus formal," because it is used primarily in structured situations. In contrast, value sets associated with Swahili are: 1) "secondary official," i.e. as an adjunct lingua franca crossing a broader range of the socioeconomic spectrum, 2) "neutrality" with regard to education, being learned primarily in informal contexts, 3) "plus

spatial mobility," because fluency is often acquired through moving away from one's home area, 4) "minus socioeconomic status evaluation," because there is no association between one's fluency in Swahili and one's occupation, 5) "minus formal," because it is acquired informally, 6) "minus authority," because there is no association with power, except with respect to local languages, 7) "plus national," because it is a Kenyan language, unlike English, and finally, 8) "neutral ethnicity," because the population of native speakers is small with no major power base. The relevance of these value sets will be reviewed in the discussion of the future language profile of the country.

LANGUAGE AND THE MEDIA

The major languages used in the media in Kenya are English and Swahili. These media include radio, television, motion pictures, magazines and newspapers. National radio broadcasts consist of the National Service in Swahili and the General Service in English. The air time for each of these two services is roughly equivalent, but the programs are different. Popular music and news are given on both, however, the English service emphasizes "western" music while the Swahili service emphasizes "African" music. Even with sports, the emphasis is slightly different. The English service may offer overseas rugby scores while the Swahili service broadcasts a live football (soccer) match. From 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. the Kenya Institute of Education's Educational Media Service uses the National Service for schools' broadcasting which is primarily in English, but for the remainder of the 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. daily schedule, the time devoted to Swahili and to English broadcasting is approximately the same. Regional services broadcast in a number of vernaculars, both African and Asian.

Television services are limited to Nairobi and Mombasa, with slightly different programs in each city. Both broadcast from 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. on weekdays and from 2:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Most of the television programs are in English, but there are news broadcasts of one half hour each in both English and Swahili and there are dramatic and comedy series now and then in Swahili. Much of the English language programming is imported from the United States and, to a lesser extent, European countries

and the United Kingdom. This imported fare accounts for about half of the non-Swahili programming or about 40 percent of the total. There is no vernacular broadcasting on television. Television set ownership figures were not available, but one may encounter households with them even in the poorer areas of Nairobi.

In the large motion picture houses which cater to a wealthier, more educated audience, films imported primarily from the United States but also from European countries are shown. If a film is not an English-language original, it is dubbed or, infrequently, subtitled. These films appear at five or six Nairobi cinemas and two or three in Mombasa. Other theaters in Nairobi and Mombasa present primarily Indian films in Hindi with neither dubbing nor subtitles. The audience at these theaters is often as much as two-thirds African.

Less elegant, cheaper theaters present a variety of films, including the Chinese kung fu genre, and the Italian "spaghetti" westerns. These films may be dubbed or subtitled in English, but in the dubbed versions, the sound track is often so poor as to require the audience to rely on the action for context clues, which is probably essential anyway, since most of the viewers are typically vernacular-Swahili bilinguals with limited English proficiency. Theaters in towns other than Nairobi and Mombasa generally play either "spaghetti" westerns, kung fu or Indian movies and infrequently a first-run American/European film. It would not be hazardous to advance the judgement that the English-language content of these films has contributed a great deal to positive attitudes toward English among the incipient English-speaking population of the country. Evidence in support of the thesis that motion pictures advance the language learning process is the great number of Indian movie devotees who are proficient enough in Hindi to translate dialogue from these films to "non-devotees." As English carries much more prestige in Kenya than a South Asian language, it is likely that English-language films also contribute to language learning.

There are four daily newspapers with a circulation greater than 10,000. Three of these are English-language newspapers: The Daily Nation (circulation 58,000), The Standard (35,000), and The Kenya Times (no circulation data available). The fourth of these is Taifa Leo, a Swahili-language publication with a circulation of 59,000. A fifth daily newspaper, Kenya Leo, recently

began publication. It is likely that the circulation figures on these publications have risen considerably since the publication of The Kenya Area Handbook (1975), the source for the above figures. They have probably doubled, based on The Daily Nation advertised circulation figure of "well over 100,000" in January 1983. The ratios of English-language to Swahili-language papers are likely to have changed slightly in favor of English because the Kenyan population is more educated and the expatriate segment of the population has increased.

LANGUAGE IN THE SCHOOLS

Swahili is learned primarily informally in both rural and urban contexts. The official language, English, is learned through the formal auspices of the school system. Currently, the language policy for the schools requires children to receive instruction in mother tongue for the first three years of primary school and in English thereafter. In some schools where the children come from different home language backgrounds, Swahili is treated as if it were the mother tongue of the children and is used as the medium of instruction for the first three years. In both the "pure" and the "mixed" language schools, English is taught as a subject for an average of five hours per week for the first three years of primary school in preparation for the switch to English medium instruction in the fourth year. Any child completing seven years of primary education may sit for the highly competitive Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) school-leaving examination in English which establishes the child's credentials for entry into higher (secondary) education. Because English is the language of this examination, teachers emphasize English proficiency throughout the primary years.

ENGLISH RADIO INSTRUCTION IN KENYA

The use of radio as a medium of instruction in the Kenyan schools goes back more than twenty years. School broadcasts have received more emphasis in Kenya that in any other African country. Radio instruction in Kenya is therefore not new. Much of what is taught is either instruction in content subjects or more advanced level language instruction. The latter begins only

in the second year and is not used for more than two periods a week. These upper level broadcasts are going on concurrently with the experimental programs being developed by the Radio Language Arts Project (RLAP) for the first three years of the Kenyan primary schools.

Radio is a mass medium that has the potential to contribute to the standardization of a language variety, in this case, English. It can also foster or reinforce the role of that language in a national framework. One reason why the Kenyan Ministry of Education decided to pilot this project was that is was interested in discovering whether the language of schooling could be taught better by radio than by traditional classroom methods. Specifically, the Ministry of Education wanted to see if a more effective delivery system could be devised for language instruction to schools in rural areas on the lower end of the economic scale where there are large numbers of untrained teachers. A more effective language-instructional delivery system would lessen the educational gap between urban and rural, rich and poor.

In the past, English by radio meant supplementary lessons once a week. RLAP lessons begin in term one of year one, are broadcast one half hour daily throughout the week for the full term, rather than for only eight weeks.

The formative evaluation process is an important component of RLAP instructional design. Progress in the four language skills is monitored through weekly tests and daily classroom observation. Whenever tests and observation reveal that pupil performance in a given language subskill is not up to criterion, this subskill is given more instructional exposure in the form of additional lesson segments. The shortest time span between the diagnosis of a skill deficiency and remedial instruction is about three weeks. The effect of all this is that it is reasonably certain that the pacing targeted for the average pupil is at an optimal level.

These programs are also designed to be cost-effective. They avoid excessive and elaborate print materials, which might result in a more effective product that could not be implemented because of its cost.

Three schools in each of seven districts are participating in the project: one each at the upper, mid and lower performance levels of the CPE examinations. CPE performance is probably the best index of school quality available. Choice of schools at three different CPE performance levels allows the measurement of differences across school "quality" levels.

The seven districts represent the following languages: Swahili (Bantu), Kamba (Bantu), Maasai (Nilotic), Kikuyu (Bantu), Kalenjin (Nilotic), Luhya (Bantu), and Luo (Nilotic). Speakers of these languages constitute about seventy percent of the total population. Swahili was chosen because it is a national language and also the major lingua franca of the country. The remaining languages were chosen either because they are typologically distinctive or because they have a large number of speakers. If the project continues to be successful, (first year summative evaluation test results indicate a performance increment of twenty-five percent in reading and over fifty percent in listening) it can therefore be argued that English language teaching by radio is effective both for the majority of the Kenyan population and for the speakers of major language groups in the country. Using the model developed for the RLAP, curriculum designers could easily devise a similar package for instruction in Swahili. The effect of a standardized formal radio language model is likely to reduce variation in the kind of English or any other language taught in this fashion.

THE FUTURE

It is always dangerous to make predictions about the future, but I will nevertheless hazard a few guesses about what the language picture in Kenya will look like in another ten to twenty years. Geographic and social mobility among the population is likely to increase. This increase in mobility implies more cross-ethnic contact and more use of Swahili. With more urbanization and urban-rural population movement, the number of cross-ethnic marriages is also likely to increase. This will result in more bilingual vernacular-Swahili children or monolingual Swahili-speaking children. With greater access to education, the contact with English will also increase, since English-medium instruction is likely to continue for some time, barring changes which might opt for a Swahili and/or vernacular instructional language policy. The continued use of English in the schools and its association with broadcast media, both formally, as in the RLAP, and informally via other programs, is likely to add to its prestige among lower socioeconomic groups and lead to increased use of this language in both formal and informal situations. Viewing the overall situation in terms of Scotton's value sets, I can foresee increasing competition with Swahili from English. English now has the

attribute value of "plus education;" if education becomes more universal, the exclusive character of English will diminish. English language media exposure will also probably increase in volume, thus making English less "formal." Also, as a consequence of more widespread education and a distancing from the colonial past, English will acquire characteristics tending towards a greater degree of neutrality on the formality scale. As English becomes more widespread, it may begin to acquire the "minus socio-economic status evaluation" attributed to Swahili, since it will cease to be a badge of privilege. And finally, as the colonial period recedes further into the past, English will be perceived as more ethnically neutral.

In synthesis, the emerging picture is increasingly trilingual with individual Kenyans tending toward varying degrees of proficiency in vernacular, Swahili and English, a reduction in the number of settings in which mother tongue use is considered appropriate, and competition between English and Swahili in other settings. In Africa as a whole, there is also a tendency among African writers to write in their own languages, at the cost of lessening their potential audiences. This tendency will encourage vernacular prestige, increasing competition with Swahili and English. With increasing literacy in Kenya and heightened pan-African awareness, it is not unlikely that this movement will take a stronger hold here, with the result that vernacular literacy will have to be factored into the above equation.

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